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ABSTRACT

The concept of parent education, i.e., activities or programs that offer parents an opportunity to gain information and knowledge to aid them in their role as parents, is outlined and discussed. The topics considered are: 1. What Is the Purpose of Parent Education?; II. What People Does It Serve?; III. How Organize Parent Education and Recruit Parents?; IV. Where and How Find Leaders?; V. What Is the Content of Parent Education?; VI. What Are the Methods of Parent Education?; VII. What Kinds of Programs Are Conducted? (Interpreting Education to Parents; Great Issues in Education; Special Problems of a Community-Wide Nature; Child Study and Guidance; Informal Reading and Discussion Groups; Parent Child Workshops; and Family Living Conference); and VIII. What Materials Are Available? (DB)

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PARENT EDUCATION IN THE ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM

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The University of the State of New York
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PARENT EDUCATION IN THE ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM

Outline

I. What is the Purpose of Parent Education?

II. What People Does It Serve?

III. How Organize Parent Education and Recruit Parents?

IV. Where and How Find Leaders?

V. What Is the Content of Parent Education?

VI. What Are the Methods of Parent Education?

VII. What Kinds of Programs Are Conducted?

- A. Interpretation of Education to Parents
- B. Great Issues in Education
- C. Special Problems of a Community-Wide Nature
- D. Child Study and Guidance
- E. Informal Reading and Discussion Groups
- F. Parent-Child Workshops
- G. Family Living Conference

VIII. What Materials Are Available?

PARENT EDUCATION IN THE ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM

I. What is the Purpose of Parent Education?

The purpose of any parent education program or activity is to provide opportunity for parents to consider concerns and issues important to them as they carry out their function of parenthood. It offers a chance for parents to voice anxieties, profit from the experience of other parents, consider information and knowledge available from specialists and printed materials regarding the growth, development and guidance of children.

II. What People Does It Serve?

Parents of young children (babies, toddlers, preschoolers) are particularly interested because the responsibility of being a parent may be new, and their concerns are immediate. They want to "get started right."

Parents of school-age youngsters are greatly concerned with knowing more about the education of their children.

Parents of adolescents welcome an opportunity to understand their young people better and consider common problems. Activities that include both parents and young people offer opportunity to develop understanding and are especially appealing.

III. How Organize Parent Education and Recruit Parents?

One good place to begin is to organize a parent education committee as a subcommittee of the Adult Education Council. Such a committee undoubtedly should be made up of representatives of agencies and organizations concerned with parent education such as the PTA, local health and mental health organizations, church groups, family service societies, and others.

The purpose of such a committee is to review parent education activities in the community in order not to duplicate, to study the needs of parents not being served, to plan appropriate activities that could be developed under parent education, publicize them and help recruit parents. If there is no Parent Education Committee, it is advisable to discuss with agencies directly concerned what they consider the interests and needs of parents and seek their help in publicizing proposed activities and recruiting of parents.

Some directors of adult education have found it profitable to prepare an attractive brochure outlining possible activities for parents. Articles in the local newspaper also are used.

Perhaps one of the best methods of recruiting is to plan a good, provocative program or conference around a topic or interest that would be appealing to parents and provide an opportunity for

those attending to sign up for further meetings if they are interested. Individual invitations warmly worded seem to do much to encourage parents to come.

IV. Where and How Find Leaders?

Finding leaders is not always as difficult as it seems. Many communities have surprising, untapped resources if a thorough search is made.

Parent education leaders are most effective who can work informally with parent groups. Frequently there are married women in the community with a background of education and experience or both in such fields as teaching social studies, guidance, homemaking education, public health nursing, religious education, group work, settlement work, Home Bureau or the like. Or some faculty member from a nearby college may have skills of leading discussions. With a little help such leaders may be drawn into service in parent education.

To find them may require a little searching. Ask the elementary and secondary principal. If there is an AAUW, ask the president to help you find people with the above backgrounds. Talk with the Visiting Nurse Association. Consult the County Home Demonstration Agent, the local homemaking teachers, your school psychologist or your guidance counselor. Frequently the Parent-Teacher Association knows qualified people.

V. What is the Content of Parent Education?

Parent education is concerned with the factors that strengthen family living. It recognizes that to provide the best environment for children we must be concerned with all of the relationships that affect them; the relationship between parents and children, the relationships between brothers and sisters, even the relationships between children in the neighborhood. Parent education recognizes that these relations are dominant in the formation of the child's personality.

Parent education is concerned also with relationships between the home and school. Many parents are confused about modern education, and seek to understand more about it, and to know how and why it has changed since their own school days. Parent and family life education seeks to improve home and school relations and to help parents understand more about modern education.

The content of parent education is based on the interests and concerns of parents in each group. It is also based on the ages of children of the parents in the group. The content may involve problems that are home and family related, school related, neighborhood and community related or nation and world related,-all as they affect the family and its members.

Although some courses of study have been written for parent groups, - those which seem to be most satisfactory are those developed jointly by the parents and the leader.

Brochures developed for program announcement generally outline a series of meetings in terms of age groups of children. (For example "Understanding the Preschool Child - His Ways and Wants," or "Guiding the School Age Child" or "Parents in Perplexity - Understanding Today's Teenagers.") Such brochures indicate some flexibility in the plan and outline briefly what the series will be about. They might indicate some of the general concerns of parents of children at the age specified.

The content of parent education may be derived from a variety of subject areas such as biology, nutrition, psychology, sociology, anthropology, education, human relations etc., as applied to the problem at hand. No group leader, however, would be expected to be expert in all of these fields.

VI. What Are the Methods of Parent Education?

Since parent education is not only concerned with knowledge, but also with attitudes and anxieties of group members, its methods are informal.

Some content deals mainly with information-giving such as health; for example, the period of incubation of infectious diseases of children. In such cases where definite information is available-deductive methods are satisfactory. However, much of the content of parent education lies in controversial areas, and lends itself to inductive methods. Such methods begin with the concerns of the group members in regard to the topic of the day, - for parents to bring to bear on the topic their own experience and their information gleaned from reading. A summary is made by the leader at least at the end of the discussion, and more often as the discussion progresses. The summary recognizes points of agreement and of disagreement in the discussion and the highlights.

It must be recognized that such informal discussion developed individually and with participation from all the members takes time. A minimum of one and one-half hours should be allocated for it.

VII. What Kinds of Programs Are Conducted?

There are many ways of carrying on parent education. No one pattern fits every situation. However, there are some activities that can be adapted to almost any community. Among them are those discussed on the next page:

A. Interpreting Education to Parents

Many parents are vitally interested in understanding more about the school, its curriculum and its goals. In some places a series of meetings is held outlining the goals of the school and how the school attempts to achieve them.

Some parent education programs have focused on such matters as how reading and arithmetic are taught, the science program in the school, art and music education, the school's concern for the child's health, making the most of junior high school, looking ahead to college or merely understanding today's education.

Talks and discussions are supplemented by slides, motion picture films, recordings, or demonstrations of children carrying on an activity.

As a general principle when planning parent education programs to interpret education to parents it is important to choose leaders who are acquainted with the school. It is essential that the adult education director work very closely with the school principal and those responsible for the school program.

B. Great Issues in Education

Persistent problems in education are of great interest to many parents. Such matters as the following have struck a responsive chord in a number of communities:

What is the meaning of equal opportunity of education in a democracy?
How can education be improved by making best use of research available on human growth and development and learning theory?
How can parents be further involved in schools- on a decison making level as well as on a level of active participation?
What needs to be done to improve education for children from low social economic levels? for gifted children? for children with special problems, physical and emotional?
How can racial integration be fostered so that it is truly meaningful?
How can schools make best use of the inter-disciplinary approaches?
Are there effective ways of evaluating pupil progress and reporting it to parents in such a way that it is not judgmental?

What are the Benefits of multi-age grouping?
What are the benefits of teaching foreign languages in elementary school?
Should schools subscribe to a learner-oriented rather than content oriented curriculum?

Programs on these and other vital issues may consist of a series of meetings or a single meeting. In some instances single meetings lead into a plan for the development of small meetings for those wishing to pursue the topic further. Needless to say, plans for such programs are worked out in close cooperation with the school administrator.

C. Special Problems of a Community-Wide Nature

Special meetings on current concerns are planned for parents in some communities. They may be of the single meeting, "one shot" variety or a series of meetings. In either case, the program and discussion may center around much discussed concerns such as early dating of school age children, "going steady", early marriage, teenage responsibility, or a study of juvenile delinquency in the community. Some parents in cooperation with young people have dealt with the problem of all night parties on high school graduation night. A study of community recreation for young people has been of interest to some parents also.

Meetings of this nature may feature an outside speaker, or a panel discussion. Sometimes a discussion leader divides the audience into small groups to outline concerns, or pose solutions which are reported back to the total group and the total group is then involved by the leader in constructive thinking and action.

The development of a code of behavior for young people is sometimes a by-product or a result of such study and discussion between parents and adolescents of current, vital concerns.

D. Child Study and Guidance

Many parents (and <u>especially</u> parents of young children) welcome opportunities to share ideas, read and study regarding such matters as how children grow and develop, what is constructive discipline, why youngsters quarrel, how to help children develop a sense of responsibility, what to expect of children at various ages, how to help children develop sound moral values, teenage use of the family car or how to help children and youth make

transitions (home to kindergarten, elementary school to junior high, junior high to high school, high school to college).

Adult education directors and parent education leaders have set up a series of meetings to enable parents to discuss these and other vital topics. Sometimes the groups are limited to Understanding the Preschool Child - or the School Age Child or the Adolescent. Sometimes they cut across age level lines. As a general principle, however, it is advisable to gear the groups to a certain age level since the parents usually want to work on immediate problems and concerns.

Such discussion groups are more effective when the number attending is fairly small. Twelve to twenty makes a good discussion group. Such groups are also more effective when they are conducted informally by a leader who knows how to encourage people to talk, helps them to "keep on the track" and summarizes the ideas, agreements, disagreements and conclusions.

E. Informal Reading and Discussion Groups

Similar to the child study groups mentioned above, reading groups base their discussions upon printed material. Although all members try to do some reading and study between meetings, at least two parents volunteer each time to read a pertinent chapter, or a magazine article, or a pamphlet on the topic and report to the group. They follow up the report by presenting one or two provocative questions for group discussion.

This type of group may be led by a person who has received some help in leading discussion but may not necessarily be a trained experienced person. However, it is important to have good leadership to prevent the group from deteriorating into a gossip fest.

F. Parent Child Workshops

Parents and children learning together form the basis for a different type of parent education activity which has proven quite satisfactory in a number of communities. For instance, one group of fifth and sixth grade parents and children met regularly under a competent teacher to learn and practice conversational French. Similar groups have concentrated on Spanish, German or other foreign language. A carry-over to the home has been the fun of practicing the language in the family.

Other workshops for parents and children have focused on painting, finger painting, clay modeling, and woodworking.

Values other than the skills learned or understandings gained are worth mentioning. Parents have reported that when they participated with their youngsters in such workshops and had fun together, relationships were strengthened between them.

G. Family Living Conference

Some communities have experimented successfully with a one-day family living conference. An outstanding authority serves as the keynote speaker. Roundtable discussion groups are developed around various phases of the topic presented by the speaker.

A mental health play followed by discussion has proven especially provocative for discussion and is well suited to this type of program. This type of play is rooted in the everyday problems and concerns of parents.

Many times a luncheon or dinner meeting is a feature of the conference.

Such a conference frequently becomes a stepping stone to organizing discussion groups for parents.

VIII. What Materials Are Available?

The Bureau of Child Development and Parent Education in the State Education Department makes available some materials for leaders. In addition it provides the following:

A Few Suggested References on Group Leadership
Annotated Bibliography for Parents of Adolescents
Annotated Bibliography on the Family
Annotated Film List for Parents
Annotated Pamphlet List for Parents of Young Children
Family Living Skits
Making a Plan for Leading a Discussion Group
What Does Parent and Family Life Education Include?
What Is a Workshop?

ERIC Clearinghouse
JAN 8 1973
on Adult Education

There are many excellent pamphlets on a wide variety of subjects available from various organizations. Write to the Bureau of Child Development and Parent Education for addresses.

Through your local library it is possible to obtain selection of books from the State Library.